



Sam Brownback

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BROWNBACK TO PUSH FORWARD WITH BROADBAND LEGISLATION AFTER COMMERCE COMMITTEE HEARING

WASHINGTON – U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback today chaired a Senate Commerce Committee hearing on S. 2902, the Broadband Internet Regulatory Relief Act of 2000, legislation that Brownback introduced to speed the deployment of broadband services in rural areas.

"Today's hearing reaffirms why we need legislation to ensure that rural communities are not left on the wrong side of the digital divide," Brownback said. "I challenged the witnesses to help me find a solution to the growing disparity between broadband access in urban/densely-populated suburban areas and rural areas. I remain convinced that my legislation, which provides deregulatory incentives to encourage companies to build broadband networks in rural areas, is the best solution to this problem.

"A recent NTIA/RUS study determined that broadband is much less likely to be available in small towns than it is in large cities. For example, according to one survey, more than 73 percent of cities with populations of 500,000 to one million have cable-modem and/or DSL service, but less than five percent of towns of 5,000 to 10,000 have cable-modem service, and less than two percent of such towns have DSL service. And all of the cities surveyed that had populations greater than 1 million had both cable-modem and DSL service, while less than 2 tenths of one percent of towns of less than 1,000 people had either cable-modem or DSL.

"I recognize that some people think that competition alone will drive deployment in rural areas, and that others believe that tax or other government subsidies will eliminate the digital divide. But after listening to today's witnesses, I remain convinced that providing the proper deregulatory incentives, without undermining competition, is the best way to spur deployment in rural areas.

"Incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) already provide telephone and other services in rural areas. Competitive local exchange carriers (CLECs) primarily, if not entirely, serve business customers in urban and densely-populated suburban markets. While CLECs may be driving broadband deployment in higher-density communities, we cannot wait for CLECs to serve rural areas.

"If we wait for CLECs to drive deployment of broadband services in rural areas, it will be years before such services will be available to thousands of rural communities. By simply creating parity in the way that broadband services are regulated, we can ensure that ILECs have the same economic incentive to deploy broadband services as any other carrier. With such an incentive, ILECs can deliver broadband services to less-populated areas. We do not want our rural communities to be left behind as urban and suburban areas race into the digital age," Brownback said.